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Annual ministerial review: implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women

Statement submitted by Centre for Social Research, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2010/100.

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Statement

In the face of the global economic slowdown, it has become evident that the vulnerability of developing and rising economies has to be addressed more efficiently. Obviously, as has happened in India, the most affected sections of society are always the poorest, especially women, who mostly work in the informal sector, with unsafe working conditions, low earnings and irregular employment. Here, international institutions, such as the Economic and Social Council, play a vital role in renegotiating global financial policies, suggesting actions to promote honest practices and framing development policies in favour of marginalized sections of societies, such as women.

Centre for Social Research, through its long-standing and relentless work in India to further the social, economic and political empowerment of women, highlights the importance of taking affirmative steps, such as quotas, towards the inclusion of women in political processes and ensuring that the needs of both sexes are addressed. Centre for Social Research, along with the women's movement in India, has lobbied for nearly a decade for the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill, which provides for 33 per cent representation of women in Parliament. Over the past two years, we partnered with the United Nations Democracy Fund and the Government of India to build the leadership capacities of 1,000 women active in politics across the country.

We feel that women's political leadership should be strengthened in terms of realizing the agenda of people-centred and sustainable development and working towards the elimination, in law and in reality, of discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, caste and age. Democratic freedoms, such as freedom of expression, media, opinion, peaceful assembly and association, are necessary vehicles for women's full political participation. In countries where religion and culture impose numerous social restrictions and impinge on State laws, women experience more difficulties in accessing education and engaging in the public political space. The fulfilment of basic survival and social needs, economic independence and freedom from family and community violence are equally crucial requirements in women's realization of their full potential.

As far as the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women are concerned, these will fail if they are not turned into effective policies and actions. Gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting are the central measures that should be taken up by national Governments to allow women an equal share of development. Gender mainstreaming efforts integrate gender perspectives and the goal of gender equality in government policymaking, planning, implementation and evaluation. It also makes Governments more efficient in serving the needs of their citizens by ensuring that even seemingly neutral policies and programmes take into account women's concerns and needs right at the outset. Further, gender-responsive budgeting helps to increase government expenditures on social services that benefit mostly women and children and to steer government priorities towards the "care" economy, such as health and nutrition, education and other family and community services.